

Description

VEHICLE SUSPENSION WITH IMPROVED RADIUS ARM TO AXLE ATTACHMENT

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to the structure of a three link vehicle suspension system including a pair of radius arms and a track bar.

[0003] 2. Background Art

[0004] Vehicle suspension systems connect an axle to a frame of a vehicle. Suspension system components typically include shock absorbers, springs, torsion bars, and other components. Vehicle suspensions are dynamic systems that move in response to braking, turning, acceleration and road induced impacts. The vehicle must be designed to allow for substantial movement of suspension system components relative to each other and to the other vehicle components.

[0005] Four and five link suspension systems have been developed that offer some advantages in regard to vehicle design. However, these systems have pairs of upper and lower arms that increase the cost and part count of the suspension systems. In addition, four and five link systems generally require a greater number of expensive bushings.

[0006] One example of a heavy duty suspension system is a three link suspension system that may include two radius arms and a track bar. The radius arms connect through rubber bushings to the frame and normally extend below the axle. Radius arms generally connect to axle mounting structures that are located fore and aft of the axle. The track bar may be a Panhard rod or a Watt's linkage that laterally connects to the axle and the frame through rubber bushings or an equivalent joint such as a spherical joint. The track bar and steering links may be located on the opposite side of the axle from the side on which the radius arms are connected to the frame. Any portion of the radius arms that extend beyond the axle to the opposite side may complicate suspension system design and create interference with the steering linkage.

[0007] Radius arms must be strong and durable to withstand im-

pacts and stresses encountered in normal and extreme driving conditions. Suspension systems must provide acceptable ride quality and minimize harshness. Rubber bushings are used to absorb vibration and soften the ride of a vehicle. Bushings may be selected to tune roll stiffness, caster stiffness, caster change, steering, and tracking performance characteristics.

[0008] Normally, the longer the radius arm, the lower the amount of brake anti-dive. Longer radius arms also tend to reduce the caster angle sensitivity relative to suspension deflection and ride height.

[0009] The roll stiffness of a front suspension linkage may be impacted by bushing radial stiffness, bushing separation distance, axle tube torsional stiffness, radius arm bending stiffness, radius arm lateral separation and the radius arm length. While all of the above factors may impact roll stiffness, generally the longer the radius arm, the lower the roll stiffness and the stiffer bushings must be to compensate.

[0010] Bushings used in suspension systems may exhibit different loading characteristics. Bushings may exhibit conical loading, particularly if the bushings are installed fore-and-aft of the axle as in typical suspension system de-

signs. Radial loading of bushings is generally preferred because it is more predictable and maximizes bushing performance characteristics.

[0011] The above problems and challenges are addressed by applicants' invention as summarized below.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] According to one aspect of the present invention, a vehicle suspension system subassembly is provided for supporting a vehicle on an axle. The subassembly comprises right and left radius arms, each of which have a first end secured to a frame of the vehicle and a second end forming a bracket on which first and second bushings are secured. The first and second bushings are arranged in a vertically spaced relationship relative to each other so that both of the bushings are disposed on the first side of the axle. A right axle connection structure is connected to a right side of the axle and secured to the first and second bushings of the right radius arm. A left axle connection structure is connected to the left side of the axle and is secured to the first and second bushings of the left radius arm. A track bar extends laterally from the axle to the frame of the vehicle from a location near a first end side of the axle to a location near a second end side of the

axle.

[0013] According to other aspects of the invention as they relate to the vehicle suspension system subassembly, the radius arms may each include first and second cup-shaped elongated half arms that are assembled together in a clamshell manner to define a hollow elongated arm. The brackets on the second ends of the right and left radius arms may include one flange on a first half arm and one flange on the second half arm. The track bar may be disposed on the opposite longitudinal side of the axle from the first side thereof. The first end of the track bar is connected to the frame through a first bushing, while the second end of the track bar is connected to the axle through a second set of bushings.

[0014] According to another aspect of the present invention, an improved radius arm is provided for a front axle suspension system of a vehicle. The vehicle has an axle that is connected to a frame element of the vehicle that is spaced rearward relative to the axle. The axle has a connector extending rearwardly from the axle and a receptacle in which a pair of bushings are retained in a vertically aligned relationship behind the axle. The bushings each have a central bore through which a fastener is inserted.

The radius arm comprises an elongated arm having a forward end on which a bracket is provided. The bracket defines a clevis on which a pair of bushings are assembled to upper and lower vertically aligned fasteners. The fasteners extend through the fastener receptacle bores in the bushings. A frame bushing is provided at the rearward end of the arm and is adapted to connect the rearward end of the arm to the frame of the vehicle.

[0015] According to other aspects of the invention as it relates to the radius arm structure, the elongated arm may be formed as a two-part clamshell structure fabricated as sheet metal half shells that are welded together to form a hollow space within the arm. The half shells are welded together about their outer edges to seal the hollow space within the arm.

[0016] According to another aspect of the invention, a combination comprising an axle and a radius arm is provided for a vehicle. The axle has a central axis and a connection structure to which the radius link is secured. The radius link comprises an elongated body connected at a first end to the frame and to a bracket at a second end. A pair of bushings are secured to the connection structure of the axle and to the bracket at the second end of the body.

The bushings are disposed on the same fore and aft side of the central axis of the axle and are vertically spaced relative to each other.

[0017] According to other aspects of the invention relating to the combination of an axle and radius arm, the body and bracket may be disposed on one side of the axle so that they do not extend longitudinally beyond the central axis of the axle. The bushings may be connected to the bracket by fasteners that are oriented parallel to the central axis of the axle and are vertically aligned with one another so that one of the bushings is disposed at a greater height than the central axis and the other bushing is disposed at a lower height than the central axis.

[0018] The bushings may have a central bore through which a fastener is inserted to secure the bracket to the connection structure of the axle. The central bores are parallel to the central axis of the axle and form a triangular supporting array on one side of the axle wherein no part of the triangular supporting array extends directly below or directly above the central axis. A frame connector bushing has a central bore for receiving a fastener that is adapted to connect the first end of the body to the frame of the vehicle. The bushings may be connected to the brackets

by fasteners that are oriented parallel to the central axis of the axle.

[0019] The frame connector may include a bushing that has a central bore for receiving a fastener that is adapted to connect the first end of the body to the frame of the vehicle. The central axis of the axle, the fasteners that connect the resilient bushings to the brackets and the central bore of the resilient bushing that connects the first end of the body to the frame are preferably arranged in a quadrilateral array on one side of the axle.

[0020] These and other features and aspects of the present invention will be better understood in view of the attached drawings and following detailed description of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0021] Figure 1 is a rear side perspective view of a front suspension system for a four wheel drive vehicle;

[0022] Figure 2 is a bottom plan view thereof;

[0023] Figure 3 is a fragmentary exploded perspective view of an axle bracket, radius arm and bushing;

[0024] Figure 4 is a partial cross-section view of a side of the block bushing assembled to an axle bracket, radius arm,

clevis and carriage bolt fastener; and

[0025] Figure 5 is a graph comparing roll torque to roll angle of a suspension system having a fore/aft bushing orientation compared to applicants' vertical bushing orientation.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT(S)

[0026] Referring to Figures 1 and 2, a front axle suspension assembly 10 is shown to include a front axle tube 12 that extends between the front wheel mounts 14. It should be understood that the front axle suspension assembly 10 is described as being exemplary and it should not be understood to limit the construction of the claims of this application to front axles since the invention is equally applicable with a reversed fore-and-aft orientation to rear axle suspension assemblies. The suspension assembly 10 also includes a ring/pinion housing 16 to which a drive shaft (not shown) of a four wheel drive vehicle may be connected. The suspension assembly 10 also includes a set of springs 18 and shock absorbers 20 that are used to provide suspension damping, as is well known in the art. A steering gear 22 is shown above the front axle suspension assembly 10 that functions to steer the front wheels (not shown). A drag link 24, and stabilizer bar 28 are also provided forward of the front axle 12. In addition, a tie rod

32 is provided that links the wheel mounts 14 together.

[0027] A three link suspension subassembly is defined by a Pan-hard rod 34, a right radius arm 36 and a left radius arm 40. Right radius arm 36 is connected to the axle 12 by an axle bushing assembly 42. The opposite end of the right radius arm is connected by a frame bushing assembly 48 to the frame (not shown) of the vehicle (not shown). The left radius arm 40 is connected to the ring/pinion housing 16 by a housing bushing assembly 44. The left radius arm 40 is connected to the vehicle frame by frame bushing assembly 50 that is located at the opposite end of the left radius arm 40 from the housing bushing assembly 44.

[0028] Referring to Figure 2, the axle tube 12 has a central axis A. The bushings connecting the radius arm 36 to the axle tube 12 each have a central bore with an axis B. The bushing that connects the radius arm 36 to the frame has an axis F.

[0029] Referring to Figures 3 and 4, the connecting elements of the right radius arm 36 and radius arm axle bushing assembly 42 are shown in greater detail. A clevis 56 is formed on the forward end 58 of the right radius arm 36. Upper fastener bosses 60 and lower fastener bosses 62 are both located on the same side, that is the rearward

side of the front axle tube 12. The fastener bosses 60 and 62 may also be described as being vertically aligned.

However, it should be understood that vertical alignment would not require an exact vertical relationship, but should be construed such that the upper fastener bosses 60 are generally above the lower fastener bosses 62.

[0030] The radius arm 36 includes an inner shell 64 and an outer shell 66. The inner and outer shells 64 and 66 are separately formed in a sheet metal forming operation and are mated together in a clamshell fashion. The inner and outer shells 64 and 66 may be welded together about their periphery to provide a strong, sealed structure.

[0031] A carriage bolt 68 and nut 70 is inserted through a central bore 74 of silent block bushing 72. Silent block bushing 72 includes a rubber core 76 through which central bore 74 is formed. An outer shell 78 is provided around the rubber core 76. A flange 80 of the radius arm axle bushing 42 defines a bushing receptacle bore 82. The bushings 72 are each received in one of the bushing receptacle bores 82 with the outer shell 78 nesting within the bushing receptacle bore 82. Each of the carriage bolts 68 extends through one of the fastener bosses 60, 62 and through the central bore 74 of the bushing 72. The bush-

ing 72 is retained within the clevis 56 of the radius arm 36. The bushing 72 connects the axle bushing assembly 42 to the radius arm 36 with a specified bushing rate.

[0032] Referring to Figure 5, a plot comparing a busing arrangement having the disclosed vertical orientation to an equivalent fore/aft bushing orientation wherein the bushings are secured to an axle with one bushing in front of the axle and the other bushing being located behind the axle. The bushing locations of the fore/aft bushings used in the comparison is approximately the same in the fore/aft direction relative to the axle centerline as the vertical spacing of the vertically located bushings. All of the bushings used in the comparison had the same bushing rate. The vertical bushings show an increased roll stiffness for a given bushing rate than the equivalent fore/aft bushings. For example, for a roll angle of 6, the roll torque is approximately 14,000 N-m. While for a roll angle of 6°, the roll torque for an equivalent fore/aft bushing is less than 12,500 N-m.

[0033] While the best mode for carrying out the invention has been described in detail, those familiar with the art to which this invention relates will recognize various alternative designs and embodiments for practicing the invention

as defined by the following claims.